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Chairman: Mr. SCHAFER (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Schäfer (Germany), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 72: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/46/13 and Add.1, 373, 399, 535-541, 622)

1. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in tne Near East), introducing his annual report (A/46/13 and Add.1) on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said that its consideration was taking place in a new environment, different from that of previous years. For the first time since 1947, Israelis and Palestinians had officially talked to each other across a negotiating table and the peace process was under way, in itself a significant achievement.

2. UNRWA was unique in the United Nations system and its history was intertwined with the history of the Palestine problem. Indeed, it was because the issue of Palestine could not be resolved in 1947, causing great numbers of Palestinians to become refugees, that UNRWA had been created specifically to serve that national group. Since then it had played an important role in the destiny of that people. The Agency had been in operation since 1950 and was currently providing services to over 2.5 million Palestine refugees in its five areas of operation - Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

3. Over the last 40 years, UNRWA had been affected by the convulsions in the region. The wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, the civil war in Lebanon, the Israeli invasion of 1982, the intifadah and the Israeli response to it, the Gulf crisis, all had left their mark on UNRWA activities and operations. Each time, those developments had obliged UNRWA to increase its operations, but with the same limited resources. Moreover, since 1948 the Palestinian population in the Middle East had increased considerably, and stood currently at some 5.5 million.

4. The Palestine question was now at a turning point. The long-term fate of UNRWA was not in doubt: the Agency would be dissolved and would transfer its facilities, structures and services to the emerging Palestinian institutions. That day would be for UNRWA not a day of sorrow but a day of completion and achievement. Since 1950, each Commissioner-General of UNRWA had hoped to be the last one; he himself was the tenth, and that was his hope as well. On that day, the 19,000 Palestinians on the staff of UNRWA would find their place in the new administrative structures, and their services would be needed even more in the new environment. The hundreds of thousands of graduates of UNRWA schools and training centres would continue to serve their community and the schools, clinics, training centres, hospitals and other installations would continue to function.

(Mr. Türkmen)

5. If the negotiations proceeded successfully and there was agreement on a period of transition, the problem for UNRWA was not in the long term but in the short and medium term. It was for Member States to decide what UNRWA's role would be during that period; but given its expertise, its historical experience, its Palestinian staff, its links with the community, its infrastructure and logistical system, its installations, and its records and archives, the Agency could be an extremely useful partner during the transition, thus preventing a sudden decline in the essential services it had been providing for four decades. It was precisely those areas in which UNRWA had been most active - education, health, relief services and social services - that were most likely to be transferred to Palestinian control during an interim period of autonomy arising out of the peace process that had begun in Madrid. The Agency would be most pleased to contribute constructively during the transitional period in whatever manner the international community deemed most appropriate. Regardless of whether the peace process brought about rapid changes or no change at all, one thing was clear: the vital humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA must continue, and the Agency must be given the necessary financial resources to discharge its responsibilities.

6. UNRWA programmes had two basic aspects: first, they capitalized on the manpower offered by the refugees themselves in the fields of health, education, vocational training and social services. With UNRWA assistance, and despite the harsh realities, the Palestinians had succeeded in becoming currently one of the most educated peoples in the region and one most able to follow the path of autonomous socio-economic development. Secondly, UNRWA programmes provided a range of essential services to a range of beneficiary groups, something which other United Nations agencies could do only within their respective mandates. For example, in addition to its general educational, health and relief and social services, UNRWA provided services targeted at women refugees, young people, the disabled and others with special needs. In a sense, UNRWA was a microcosm of the entire United Nations system.

7. UNRWA hoped that one of the immediate consequences of the peace negotiations would be significant and discernible improvements in the general situation in the occupied territory, and an atmosphere of greater mutual confidence and relaxation of tension. That might allow a substantial socio-economic development programme to be initiated with help from different United Nations agencies. Such an undertaking would be productive and efficient only if it was well coordinated and well managed and based on a deep understanding of the social and economic needs of the Palestinian community. It was his hope that, in the near future, there would be a high-level meeting of United Nations agencies to discuss that issue and to ensure the best possible use of resources.

8. Updating his report, he referred to the most important developments in the situation of Palestinians since 30 June 1991, the end of the period covered by the report. An emergency situation continued in three of the five

(Mr. Türkmen)

fields of operation (Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip), while a fourth, Jordan, had been seriously affected by the Gulf crisis. The report gave details of the fourth year of the intifadah and spoke of the negative impact of the Gulf crisis on the socio-economic conditions of the 1.7 million Palestinians in the occupied territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 950,000 of whom were registered refugees. The economy of the territory remained depressed; unemployment still ran high; job opportunities and the possibility of work in Israel were still at a reduced level; schools had been closed for approximately 40 per cent of the school year; remittances from the Gulf countries had been lost and domestic and export revenue had dropped; and security measures had increased. All those factors had compounded an already deteriorating situation, and created more poverty and thus more candidates for the Agency's category of special hardship cases.

9. UNRWA operations in Jordan, where some 900,000 registered refugees lived, were also feeling the impact of the Gulf crisis as Palestinians who had returned to Jordan from the Gulf, in particular from Kuwait, turned increasingly to the Agency. Over 6,000 children from such families had registered in Agency schools, leading to still more crowded classrooms. The Palestinians who had returned had turned to the Agency for medical care and other social services. The influx had imposed an even heavier burden on Jordan's economy, and had created serious problems which the Government had had to confront.

10. It was to be hoped that the Palestinians in Lebanon, whose numbers could be as high as 400,000, would benefit from the encouraging developments in Lebanon following 15 years of conflict. UNRWA had to address a number of pressing issues in that connection, such as housing for some 4,000 families who had been displaced following the return of the rightful owners of buildings in which they had been squatting, employment opportunities for Palestinians, and assurances that Palestinians who had nowhere else to go could stay on in Lebanon until other solutions were found. Since the Agency could not meet those needs in four of its fields of operations from its regular budget, it had appealed for additional funds.

11. In contrast to its other fields of operations, Agency activities had continued to run smoothly in the Syrian Arab Republic, where it provided services to 290,000 registered refugees.

12. In his visit to Kuwait in September, he had held discussions with the Government on the situation of Palestinians in that country. Many of those Palestinians had UNRWA registration cards, but had not requested UNRWA's services for years. He had received assurances from the Kuwaiti Government that no Palestinians would be expelled from Kuwait on expiry of their residence permits on 15 November, and that residence permits would be issued to those Palestinians who could find a job in Kuwait, in either the government or private sectors. More recently he had been informed that the 15 November deadline had been extended to 21 December 1991. One of the important issues

(Mr. Türkmen)

for Palestinians remaining in Kuwait was that of free education for the children of poor families. He was confident that the issue would be resolved in a constructive manner. The Kuwaiti Government's contribution to UNRWA had substantially increased over the year.

13. UNRWA's financial situation and the uncertainty as to whether sufficient funding would be forthcoming in the near future remained a matter of serious concern. In addition to the growing need for financial resources for its regular programmes, UNRWA also required continued support for its emergency programmes in Lebanon and the occupied territory. Similarly, funding was needed for a small-scale income-generation programme, through which it was hoped to create jobs and boost the local economy, in particular in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but also in Jordan and Lebanon. Further, with the encouragement of the international community UNRWA had embarked on the construction of a 200-bed general hospital in the Gaza Strip, for which it hoped that donors would provide funds for equipment and operating costs. Whenever UNRWA embarked on emergency assistance or expanded programmes in the occupied territory, it was careful to do so without affecting existing services in other programmes or fields. Lastly, he noted that UNRWA had switched to a biennial budget system with effect from 1992 so as to bring the Agency into line with the major part of the United Nations system and to improve planning. UNRWA welcomed the new relationship with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which at the current session had seen and commented on its budget for the first time. UNRWA, as a temporary organization, could not undertake the type of long-term planning conducted by other United Nations bodies. Nevertheless, in the interests of efficiency and optimal use of resources, and in order to conduct shorter-term planning, during the year UNRWA had introduced the concept of forward planning, which would allow it to respond efficiently and quickly to needs in what was a rather unpredictable and volatile region.

14. He trusted that by the time the Special Political Committee began its meetings at the forty-seventh session the peace negotiations would have been completed satisfactorily, or at least progressed to such an extent that all could look to the future with hope. It went without saying that if the peace process failed, the situation that would arise would be much worse than that obtaining before the Madrid Conference. An era of a just and lasting peace could not begin in the Middle East without a solution to the Palestine problem.

15. Mr. SEIM (Norway), speaking as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, introduced the report of the Working Group (A/46/622), in the debate under agenda item 72 (b), and recalled that the Comptroller of the Agency had briefed the Working Group and indicated the current financial situation of UNRWA and its needs for 1992. Following the briefing the Working Group had formulated its concluding remarks, which were contained in Part IV of its report.

(Mr. Seim, Norway)

16. The Working Group was pleased to note that UNRWA expected to be able to deliver the essential elements of its regular programme for the year, but noted with concern that the construction programme was again seriously underfunded. The Working Group was particularly concerned that the Agency was experiencing serious difficulties in funding its emergency programmes in the occupied territories, and urged Governments to respond generously to the special appeal recently made by the Commissioner-General.

17. The Working Group shared the concern of the Commissioner-General over funding prospects for 1992. Expenditure under the regular programme was expected to increase by 5 per cent, which would lead to a need for increased contributions. The principal concern was the complete absence of funding in 1992 for the emergency-related programmes, since their discontinuance could have serious humanitarian and political consequences, especially in the occupied territories.

18. The Working Group concluded its report by strongly urging all Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA to start to do so, Governments that had so far made only relatively small contributions to increase them, and Governments that had made generous contributions to continue to do so and strive to increase them. Further, Governments should consider making special additional contributions in support of the emergency-related programmes in Lebanon and the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without reducing their contributions to the regular programme.

19. The Working Group also suggested that consideration should be given to holding an international information day on UNRWA to make the Agency better known throughout the international community with the aim of broadening the base of its financial support.

20. Mr. SALAH (Jordan) said that his country was deeply interested in the problem of Palestinian refugees and had granted asylum to a large number of them. The General Assembly, through the Special Political Committee, considered the item every two years, which made it possible to inform the international community about the difficult conditions facing Palestinian refugees. The improved political climate in the Middle East should not lessen the commitment of the international community to helping to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel, which had been responsible for the problem of Palestinian refugees since 1948, refused to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions. If the current peace efforts were successful, the United Nations should strengthen its activities on behalf of the social and economic development of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, as provided for in Security Council resolution 681 (1990), the United Nations should protect the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

21. Since UNRWA had special knowledge and experience and a special infrastructure, it was the ideal channel for coordinating the assistance which was to be provided to the Palestinian people. In order to provide and to

(Mr. Salah, Jordan)

increase its services, the Agency needed material support from donor and other countries, and, as the Commissioner-General and the Advisory Commission had pointed out, more assistance was required, particularly since the Gulf crisis, which had had adverse affects on the region.

22. Jordan had the largest number of Palestinian refugees in its territory, and it provided them with educational, health and social welfare services. It provided those services because it considered that to be its humanitarian and national duty, but it hoped that the international community would assist it in that task.

23. While the Agency had been established on a provisional basis, the problem which had led to its establishment had not been solved, and UNRWA continued to need help. Unfortunately, there was a gap between the needs of the Palestinians and the assistance which the Agency could provide.

24. UNRWA, which was a neutral organization, was facing obstacles set up by Israel. Accordingly, it was important for Israel to show respect for UNRWA and its officials; countries which had friendly relations with Israel should convince it of the importance of adopting that attitude.

25. He expressed appreciation for the moral support provided by the Secretary-General to the Agency and the hope that such efforts would be continued. Lastly, he believed that the headquarters of the Agency should be relocated to Beirut, since living conditions in Lebanon had become safer and the Government had regained control.

26. Mr. MANSOUR (Observer for Palestine) said that there was no need to mention, once again, the origin of the Palestinian refugee problem; it was sufficient to refer to the reports submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council in accordance with its resolution 681 (1990), to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and to the statements of many speakers during debates in the Security Council, in order to get an ample description of the brutality of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The Commissioner-General's report summarized the situation in paragraphs 3 to 11 and 66 to 106. The information contained in the report was a true reflection of the situation in a war zone. Table 12 gave the number of Palestinian civilian casualties during the period from 1 July 1990 to 30 June 1991, which came to 14,031. The true figures were even higher, because the numbers provided by UNRWA were based on information from UNRWA hospitals and clinics only. He recalled that there had been 157 deaths among the 14,031 casualties. A substantial proportion of those casualties had been children and women, and 9,850 had been refugees.

27. UNRWA had protested those and other measures adopted by Israel as violations on the part of the occupying Power of the standards of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

number of casualties from the beginning of the intifadah to 30 September 1991 included 1,556 killed, approximately 25 per cent of them children, and 118,000 wounded. Eight thousand pregnant women had suffered miscarriages, mainly as a result of the use of tear-gas. One hundred and twenty thousand people had been detained, 69 individuals and 300 families had been expelled, and 10,717 curfew days (excluding the Gulf war) had been imposed in occupied Palestinian territory. Two thousand and fifty houses had been demolished or sealed, 215,000 olive and fruit trees had been uprooted and 379,302 dunums of land had been confiscated to build new settlements or to expand existing ones, especially in occupied Jerusalem. All those acts had been committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

28. The intifadah was the highest form of resistance against Israeli occupation; its main goals were to end the occupation and to attain the full sovereignty of the State of Palestine on its national soil. It was the obligation of the international community to respond to the call of the Palestinian people and to force Israel, the occupying Power, to comply.

29. Since 1967, Israel had been violating the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and had not complied with the recommendations on ways and means for ensuring the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with Security Council resolution 605 (1987); on the contrary, its brutality against the Palestinian people had intensified, as shown by the massacres carried out by Israeli forces at Al-Haran Al-Sharif on 8 October 1990 and at Rafah on 29 December 1990.

30. The situation could no longer be dealt with through an appeal to Israel or a demand that it respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, since the occupying Power had forfeited its responsibilities. Israel was acting like a State which had annexed occupied Palestine. Accordingly, his delegation reaffirmed its wish for the occupied Palestinian territories to be placed under United Nations supervision for a limited period, in order to protect the Palestinian people and to create an atmosphere conducive to a just peace. In that connection, his delegation reaffirmed its support for the Secretary-General's proposal that a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should be convened to discuss possible measures with regard to the Israeli rejection of the de jure applicability of the Convention to all the territories which it had occupied since 1967.

31. Since the adoption in 1948 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which called, inter alia, for the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes and property, the United Nations had been endeavouring to solve the problem of Palestinian refugees. Nevertheless, the Israeli leaders had consistently refused to comply with that resolution and other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. That situation had forced the General Assembly to establish UNRWA in 1949 with a mandate which had been renewed since then. For their part, the Israeli leaders'

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

objective had been the destruction of the refugee camps and the forced integration of the refugees into the Arab countries, as shown by the demolition of refugee shelters in the camps in occupied Palestine and the repeated Israeli attacks against the camps in Lebanon. Another dangerous Israeli measure was the massive Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union and elsewhere, which was designed to expel all the Palestinians from the occupied territories so as to deny the existence of the Palestinian people and their inalienable national rights. Among those rights were the right of refugees and the displaced to return to their homes and property, the right to self-determination and the right to independence and statehood under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, was essential for the realization of those rights.

32. Palestine once again declared its willingness to achieve peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine and the conflict in the Middle East, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The appropriate mechanism for achieving a just and comprehensive solution was to convene the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation on an equal footing of the five permanent members of the Security Council and all parties to the conflict, including the PLO. However, the PLO recognized the realities which had prompted the introduction of a different mechanism, in the form of the Madrid peace conference on the Middle East, and it welcomed the convening of that conference, in which Palestine had participated, as a further demonstration of its readiness to take part in the peace process. It was an initiative which should be given support and encouraged to succeed.

33. The Palestinian people would continue its struggle to attain the objectives adopted by the twentieth session of the Palestine National Council in Algeria in September 1991, namely ensuring the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people so as to guarantee its right to freedom and national independence; securing a total Israeli withdrawal from the Arab and Palestinian occupied territories, including Holy Jerusalem; settling the question of the Palestinian refugees; establishing transitional arrangements, including the right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty over its land, water and natural resources and its right to conduct its own political and economic affairs; providing international protection for the Palestinian people in preparation for the exercise of the right to self-determination; and dismantling the existing illegal settlements in the occupied territories.

34. Now more than ever the international community must uphold international law and implement the resolutions it had adopted setting out the principles for a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine question. Israel had been wrong throughout and it was high time for it to change its attitude and fall into line with the rest of the world. His delegation commended the work

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

of UNRWA and the Commissioner-General with regard to the tragedy involving the Palestinian community in Kuwait, both those thousands seeking refuge in Jordan and those still in Kuwait. He hoped that the PLO and the Government of Kuwait would be able to find a solution based on brotherly ties and the recognition and respect of the rights of the Palestinians who had been in Kuwait for more than 40 years and of the contribution they had made to that country.

35. His delegation again called on UNRWA to make all its services available to Palestinian refugees everywhere in the world, particularly those in the occupied territories in Palestine and Lebanon, and to continue issuing identity cards to all refugees.

36. His delegation reiterated its condemnation of Israel's policy of obstructing the work of UNRWA, its failure to compensate the Agency for damage to its property and facilities resulting from the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, its policies and practices in occupied Palestine, and its refusal to cooperate with the Secretary-General in connection with the University of "Al Quds".

37. Finally, Palestine supported all efforts to enable UNRWA to carry out its mandate and wished to thank all those who had made generous donations to the Agency, whose services should be maintained and improved until a just solution to the issue was found.

38. Mr. VAN SCHAIK (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the Twelve member States of the European Community, said that UNRWA was playing an essential role in providing a minimum of stability to more than two million Palestinian refugees. However, that vital aid, which included shelter, food and education, could only be temporary. The Madrid peace conference on the Middle East had offered grounds for hope that a comprehensive political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question could be achieved, capable of creating the conditions which would restore normality to the daily lives of the Palestinians.

39. However, the economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had not improved and violence was continuing. The Israeli authorities, which under the Fourth Geneva Convention were responsible for the situation in the occupied territories, had continued to apply disproportionately repressive measures which had led to numerous casualties. Unfortunately, UNRWA had also been affected by the violence triggered by the tensions prevailing in the occupied territories, and since 1987 seven members of its staff had been killed, while harassment was making it difficult for the Agency to carry out its tasks in an effective manner. The Twelve deplored such acts of terror.

40. After the invasion of Kuwait, a vast flow of refugees including many Palestinians had sought asylum in Jordan and turned to UNRWA for medical care and education. The situation of refugees in Jordan and the occupied territories had been exacerbated by the fact that remittances sent by

(Mr. Van Schaik, Netherlands)

Palestinians living in Kuwait had stopped. The Twelve commended the efforts made by UNRWA to cope with unforseen problems by shifting the focus of its aid programmes towards emergency aid and also allowing non-registered refugees to benefit.

41. The Gulf crisis had also affected the situation in Israel and the occupied territories. The security measures taken by the Israeli authorities had affected economic life and the functioning of schools and universities in the occupied territories. The Agency's educational institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been forced to close for more than half of the 1990-1991 school year, paralysing the educational programmes which formed the major part of the Agency's aid activities, accounting for more than 60 per cent of its regular budget. The Twelve felt that the measures taken by the occupation authorities had disrupted the education programmes in a disproportionate manner and regretted that the reopening of two universities in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip had been cancelled. However, they welcomed the decision of the Israeli Government to allow the resumption of courses in all educational establishments, with the exception of the Bir Zeit University, which they hoped could be authorized to reopen as soon as possible.

42. A matter of concern to the Twelve was the persistent disregard by the Israeli authorities of the privileges and immunities of UNRWA staff and premises, including incursions into Agency installations, the almost permanent occupation of two schools in the West Bank and the entry by Israeli military personnel into clinics to question Palestinian patients, which was an unacceptable infringement of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In addition, the Agency was encountering administrative obstacles in its efforts to carry out its work.

43. The Community and its member States commended the persistent work of UNRWA staff to maintain or redeploy many programmes, such as special medical aid to Palestinians physically disabled in the course of the fighting, the establishment of income-generating schemes and the restoration of educational facilities and vocational training courses for women.

44. The Community remained concerned about the permanent insufficiency of financial resoures for the activities of UNRWA. Essential programmes such as the emergency programmes, extraordinary measures for hardship cases and the expanded programme of assistance that covered shelter rehabilitation, sanitation and water supplies should not be allowed to suffer from lack of resources. In that respect, the Community welcomed the increasing attention which the Agency was giving to income-generating projects.

45. As long as the Palestinian problem remained unresolved and continued to cause the largest and most persistent refugee problem in the Middle East, funds for the emergency programmes would be needed. In that context, the Twelve supported the proposal of the working group on the financing of UNRWA that consideration should be given to observing an International Information

(Mr. Van Schaik, Netherlands)

Day on UNRWA to make the Agency's activities better known throughout the international community with the aim of broadening the basis of financial support.

46. The Community's contribution to UNRWA was based on a convention signed between the Community and UNRWA covering the years 1990, 1991 and 1992, and amounting to $53 million. The contribution of the Community, including the sums provided by individual member States, amounted to $158 million for the period 1990-1992, which had been supplemented by food aid worth $10 million and an earlier donation of foodstuffs worth $7 million. The Community had also pledged $1.5 million towards a hospital construction project in Gaza. The overall community aid to UNRWA in 1991 had amounted to $72 million.

47. The Community and its member States welcomed the Middle East Peace Conference at Madrid and strongly supported the negotiating process which had started and in which they had participated alongside the co-sponsors. They strongly hoped that the process would lead to a comprehensive political settlement consistent with the principles reaffirmed in their statement at Madrid on 31 October 1991. Before that point was reached, the lifeline provided by the United Nations, and more specifically by UNRWA, could not derive its strength from only a restricted group of countries, and the Community and its member States urged all the States Members of the United Nations to support the Palestinian refugees not only with political statements, but also with the substantial financial assistance they required for their daily needs, their education, their children and their future.

48. Mr. GÜVEN (Turkey) said that the establishment of UNRWA went back almost to the time when the United Nations began to deal with the Palestinian question. The continued existence of the Agency symbolized, in a sense, the failure of the international community to bring about a just and lasting solution to that question.

49. There were 2.5 million registered Palestinian refugees to whom UNRWA provided education, health care, relief and social services, and general assistance through a network of 632 schools, 104 health centres and numerous other installations.

50. Turkey held the view that a lasting and equitable solution to the question of Palestine should involve the withdrawal of Israel from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians and the recognition of the rights of all States in the region, including Israel, to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries. In that context, his delegation welcomed the holding of the Middle East Peace Conference at Madrid, under the co-sponsorship of the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

51. The events of the previous year in the region, and specifically the Gulf crisis and its consequences, had presented new challenges to UNRWA in providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees. The emergency

(Mr. Güven, Turkey)

assistance provided to hundreds of thousands of evacuees who had left Kuwait after the invasion, the measures put into practice to eliminate the negative consequences of the lengthy curfews imposed on the occupied territories by Israel, and the expanded programme of income generation showed the ability of UNRWA to adjust to changing circumstances.

52. During the period covered by the Commissioner-General's report, the intifadah had entered into its fourth year and, as the report indicated, 157 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza and in the West Bank, and 14,000 wounded as a result of the harsh and indiscriminate policy of repression followed by Israel. Also of concern was the prolonged closure of UNRWA schools for Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza, where 40 per cent of the school days had been lost. In contrast to the West Bank and Gaza, his delegation was happy to note the more optimistic reporting on UNRWA activities in Lebanon, due mainly to the normalization of the political situation and the Lebanese Government's attempts to establish and extend its authority throughout the country.

53. His delegation noted with deep concern the difficulties and interference that UNRWA encountered in carrying out its operations in the occupied territories and shared the grave concern of the Commissioner-General over the violation of the Agency's privileges, immunities and premises by the Israeli authorities.

54. Since its establishment in 1949, UNRWA had been carrying out a wide range of activities in the fields of education, health, and relief and social services for the benefit of Palestinian refugees. With its nearly 19,000 staff, it was one of the largest employers in the region. His delegation was pleased to note that UNRWA had received sufficient funding to deliver the essential parts of its programme in 1990. Nevertheless, it was a matter of concern that the Agency had been forced to increase by 5 per cent the expenditures for its regular programme in order to meet the growing needs of 2.5 million people and to execute emergency-related programmes which were vital to the well-being of the refugee population. The deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the region had induced the Agency to carry out income-generation programmes which would require extra fund-raising efforts and a generous response by the international community.

55. Despite the start of the new peace process in the Middle East and the fact that the Agency had been established as a temporary organization, Turkey considered that UNRWA was the most suitable humanitarian organization to assist the Palestinian people during the current period of transition.

56. Mr. AL-MARZOUKI (Saudi Arabia) said that the number of Palestinians registered with the Agency was steadily increasing and currently totalled 2.5 million. The Agency was continuously suffering financial deficits because of the increasing demands and had been forced to reduce its projects and to overcome the obstacles to all the Agency's activities imposed by the Israeli occupying authorities.

(Mr. Al-Marzouki, Saudi Arabia)

57. Turning to the report of the Commissioner-General (A/46/13 and Add.1), he said that the year had started with attention focused on the intifadah and on developments in Lebanon. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had diverted the attention of the international community from the occupied territories and Lebanon, which had had adverse effects on the Agency. UNRWA had joined the international community in helping the thousands of refugees who had poured into Jordan and, when the war started, it had taken measures to alleviate the sufferings resulting from the total curfew imposed on the West Bank and Gaza, which had extended to the distribution of foodstuffs to the refugees and other needy persons.

58. The Israeli security forces had imposed harsh measures and their abuse of human rights had increased, resulting in the killing of 157 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the injuring of 1,400 people. The number of people killed since the start of the intifadah on 9 December 1987 had reached 988; 70,000 had been wounded, and 14,000 were in prison; including 64 employees of UNRWA. In addition, one of the gravest incidents had taken place during the year covered by the report at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where 17 people had been killed and more than 150 injured during clashes with Israeli security forces.

59. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supported the efforts of UNRWA and the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland. It also espoused their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, and supported every international effort to find a fair solution to the question of Palestine; it urged the international community to give UNRWA the support that it required to satisfy the basic needs of the Palestinian and Arab peoples under occupation.

60. Mr. SAGHIYYAH (Lebanon) said that the question of the Palestine refugees, which had been on the agenda for over 40 years, was becoming more and more serious. Continuing to delay its solution had grave implications for everybody and did not serve the long-term interest of any country interested in peace and stability in the Middle East.

61. Lebanon had suffered greatly as a result of the conflict in the region and, though not an active participant in the Arab-Israeli wars, had been turned into a battleground, with disastrous consequences. The fact that UNRWA had been established and continued to operate was an explicit admission by the United Nations of its responsibility in that regard. Thus, a problem created and perpetuated by the international community should not become a burden to any country, nor should the solution of one problem lead to the creation of another.

62. Lebanon had decided in good faith to participate in the Madrid Conference, in the hope of finding a proper solution to the Middle East conflict so as to create the right atmosphere to solve the various aspects of the issue, including that of the refugees. Its decision was also a

(Mr. Saghiyyah, Lebanon)

reaffirmation of Lebanon's commitment to the peace process. His country subscribed unreservedly to the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and to the right of every State to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries. Only if those issues were adequately addressed, without prejudice to the legitimate rights and concerns of the States directly affected or involved, could there be a safe foundation for ending the state of war and moving to a state of peace.

63. With reference to the report of the Commissioner-General, he wished first to say that there had always been a shortage of funds in the Agency's budget, while its growing needs required ever-increasing expenditures. No matter how generous contributions might be, the problem was likely to persist until the whole question of the refugees was settled.

64. Secondly, the hope of solving the problem of the refugees by settling them permanently in host countries had proved to be mistaken. The Palestine refugees had always considered themselves an integral part of the Palestinian people. They had not renounced their right to self-determination, or their hopes of returning to their own land and having a country of their own. The principle of "land for peace" was an important ingredient for the settlement of the Middle East conflict. But unless the political aspect of the refugee problem was solved, the current state of the Middle East, which was typified by violence, tension and instability, was likely not only to continue but even to deteriorate. The host countries had not declared themselves in favour of solving the refugee problem by settling the refugees permanently in their territory. So far as Lebanon was concerned, such an eventuality was unacceptable.

65. Thirdly, his delegation wished to raise the question of the assistance provided to the refugees by Lebanon. In addition to their right to work in Lebanon, they were given other less visible forms of assistance that were not mentioned in the Commissioner-General's report. For many years, the Lebanese Government had subsidized certain items, such as bread and petrol, causing a huge deficit in the Lebanese budget, and the Palestinians had benefited from such measures. Another such form of assistance was the use of the land on which the camps were situated. Neither UNRWA nor the refugees indemnified the private owners of that land for their use of it. The value of the land was many millions of dollars. Moreover, the situation was aggravated by the fact that a lot of construction had been carried out on the land without the authorization of Lebanese officials or the permission of the owners. That was a serious problem which had been deferred in view of the more urgent problems that Lebanon had to solve. Lebanon hoped that UNRWA would confine its contribution to construction in the camps to legally authorized projects.

66. Against tremendous odds, UNRWA had managed to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees and the Lebanese Government pledged its full cooperation to the Commissioner-General in the discharge of his humanitarian tasks. The situation in Beirut had improved enormously since UNRWA decided to move its

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headquarters abroad. The return of UNRWA and its staff to Beirut would therefore greatly facilitate the work of the Agency and create a favourable atmosphere for its cooperation with the authorities in the region.

67. Mr. SUMI (Japan) said that, in view of the selfless and humanitarian nature of the tasks being carried out by UNRWA, it was outrageous that the safety of its staff members and the integrity of its installations had been threatened by Israeli security forces. But it should also be noted that the staff had been threatened and attacked by some elements among the Palestinian population. Japan condemned the violation or abuse of Agency premises, whether by the Israeli security forces or by elements of the local population.

68. Japan was monitoring social and economic conditions in the occupied territories with great concern. The Gulf war had exacerbated the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where the economy had already been weakened during the three years of the intifadah and by the Israeli retaliation against it. As a result of the loss of remittances from workers in the Gulf region, there had been a dramatic drop in local income. Alarmed by that situation, the Government of Japan had decided to make a further voluntary contribution of $10 million to UNRWA in the fiscal year 1991, in addition to the $10 million contribution that it had made in March.

69. A donor country since 1953, Japan had made contributions worth more than $200 million in cash, in kind and in other forms of assistance over the years. Japan would continue to extend financial assistance to UNRWA to the best of its ability and urged other countries to give the Agency maximum support. It went without saying that the financial capacity of the countries that were traditional donors to UNRWA was not unlimited. Impassioned rhetoric in support of the Palestinian people was everywhere to be heard, but their true friends were those who responded in concrete ways to their very real needs. Japan reiterated the view expressed in the report of the working group on the finances of UNRWA, that the wealthier Governments in the region should be encouraged to raise the level of their contributions to the Agency.

70. Japan continued to take particular interest in the educational opportunities available to young Palestinians since it was on them that the future of their people depended. The practice by Israeli authorities of delaying school construction projects was of continuing concern. Also, for the fourth year in a row, education in the occupied territories had been significantly interrupted, owing to curfews, disturbances, military closures and strikes. His delegation was greatly disturbed by the fact that, according to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, educational programmes in the occupied territories had been brought to a standstill for most of January and February of the past year. While condemning the conduct of the Israeli authorities, his delegation felt that young Palestinians needed to be reminded that, for the sake of their people, they must not waste precious opportunities to gain an education. Japan had learned from its own experience that an educated population was a prerequisite to any nation-building efforts. For

(Mr. Sumi, Japan)

that reason, it continued to extend technical cooperation by providing vocational education opportunities in Japan for young Palestinians. Since the inception of that programme in 1985, the Japanese Government had provided 85 fellowships and had donated an additional $US 1 million, to be spent over a five-year period, to UNRWA's scholarship programme for secondary school graduates. A total of 141 awards had been made in the years 1989-1990 and 1990-1991 to Palestinian refugee students from the occupied territories.

71. His Government considered that it would be premature to offer a full assessment of the peace conference in Madrid; it had, however, been encouraged by the fact that all parties had continued to participate in the direct talks, and hoped that the dialogue would continue so that in the not-distant future the demands placed on UNRWA would diminish and the wave of violence in the region would subside, enabling the Palestinian people to lead peaceful and prosperous lives.

72. Mr. KADRAT (Iraq) said that since it began its work UNRWA had been trying to meet the needs of the Palestinian people created by Israel's terrorism. Israel had demolished houses, destroyed wells and used more water than it needed. It had also limited the movement of the Palestine population by curfews. Recently, Israel had harassed UNRWA staff - a Norwegian and a Palestinian staff member - near Nablus. The High Commissioner had said that Israel must change its attitude.

73. As a result of the Israeli occupation, many Palestinians lived in a very limited area, as 51 per cent of the territory was in Israeli hands. It was necessary to help the Palestine population to establish businesses and to obtain work in order to alleviate their situation. But the Zionist entity, instead of withdrawing from Palestine, continued to establish Jewish settlements, a policy in which it was supported by some States.

74. The policy of destroying UNRWA installations practised by the Zionist entity was intended to prevent the Agency from receiving the supplies it needed for its work. Moreover, the Zionist entity went so far as to steal and sell those supplies, forcing the Agency to demand compensation.

75. Mr. POSSO (Ecuador) said that his delegation had reached the conclusion that there had been a deterioration in the difficult situation of thousands of refugees in spite of the efforts and the dedication of the Agency's High Commissioner. It was clear that the Agency's activities were being interfered with and that its officials were even being attacked. There was a vicious circle involved: repression produced protests, the protests were aggressive and in turn provoked repression, which became persecution.

76. The détente the entire international community had hoped for had turned out to be a chimera. In fact there had been a dangerous increase of violence in the zone occupied by Israel and the situation of the refugees in Israel and other places was extremely precarious. Moreover, the Gulf crisis had aggravated the problem. Refugee status, which should have been temporary and subject to improvement, had been transformed into a permanent condition.

(Mr. Posso, Ecuador)

77. Those responsible for that situation wished to shift their obligations to an agency which helped the refugees, but without giving it the necessary resources. The decrease in services to the refugees reflected not only on the Agency but on the United Nations as a whole. Those who criticized the United Nations for applying double standards were fully justified in the case of the Palestinian question. Year after year the Member States of the United Nations said that that unendurable situation must be changed but it remained unchanged, when it did not deteriorate.

78. His delegation believed that humanitarian assistance was praiseworthy provided that it was timely, generous and respectful. It was aware that a general, just and lasting peace in the area was a prerequisite to the solution of the refugee problem, and that required the determined intervention of the United Nations and the good will of the principal actors in the Middle East crisis.

79. Mr. AL-SABAH (Kuwait), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Palestine had referred to the condition of the Palestinians in Kuwait and in that connection he quoted paragraph 14 of document A/46/13. Pointing out that the period between August 1990 and March 1991 coincided with the invasion and occupation of Kuwait, he said it was unfortunate that no reference had been made to the fact that 250,000 Palestinians had left Kuwait during that period.

80. The High Commissioner had said that he had visited Kuwait and that there had been a large number of Palestinians registered with UNRWA. However, for many years the Palestinians, who received free medical and educational services, had had no need to request such services. As document S/22535 indicated, the invasion of Kuwait had had serious consequences: houses, hospitals and other buildings had been demolished and the entire population had suffered as a result. The Government of Kuwait had, however, taken a number of steps to remedy the situation, to reopen the schools and other institutions and to help the entire population living in Kuwait.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.